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more than one table is served. The number of guests may therefore be from four to six, depending on the number of members of the family who will be present. All the guests are, of course, men, and it is not usual for young boys to be invited to these parties. When the guests arrive they are shown into the guest room, or if that is too small to be convenient, the room adjoining, normally some one's bedroom, will be re-arranged for the occasion. Tea is then served with cigarettes, and conversation is carried on until everyone has arrived, perhaps for nearly an hour. The guests arrive early or late in accordance with their willingness, or otherwise, to converse during this wait. After the meal it is customary to leave at once, so that the preliminary period of conversation and tea drinking corresponds to the conversation after dinner in the West.

When everyone has arrived, and the dinner is ready, the host invites them to enter the dining room and be seated. But this is not a simple or rapid operation. The table is round, and the place of honour is that which faces the entrance on the far side of the table, and which usually has the host's best bed and quilts as seat. Every one at once endeavours to sit down as far as possible from this place. The host, protesting, grabs the more honoured or elderly guest by the arm and endeavours to push him towards the seat of honour, but he, levered out of the chair he first sat in, promptly sits down in the next furthest from the place which he knows quite well he must ultimately occupy. All the other guests perform a similar pantomime, the hosts pulling them up and pushing them, protesting politely, to their destined seats. At last this contest of politeness is over and all are seated. The table has as yet nothing on it but chopsticks, small saucers of soy sauce, and four plates of cold food, ham, pickled vegetables, sliced sausage and some other cold vegetable dish.